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ABRAHAM'S LESSON IN TOLERANCE¹.

ACCORDING to Moslem tradition, Abraham was the founder of hospitality. A commentator of Ḥarīrī calls him الشيخ الذى سنّ القرى, the patriarch who introduced hospitality. (Vide Hammer-Purgstall in *ZDMG.*, VI, 57, no. 303; Grünbaum, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sagenkunde* (Leiden, 1893), p. 118.) Ṭabarī relates that the three angels—who, according to Jewish sources, were Michael, Gabriel, and Uriel (*Midrash Lekach Tobh*, ed. Buber, I, 82; *Baba Mezi'ah*, 86 b)—would not touch the food set before them by Abraham. "Why do ye not eat?" queried the patriarch. "We eat nothing without first knowing its price." Thereupon answered Abraham: "The price of these refreshments is, that you invoke the name of God before beginning and praise it when you finish." At this one of the angels remarked to the other: "Verily God did well to make this man his friend²" (cf. Grünbaum, *l. c.*, p. 119).

This pious trait of Abraham's is also referred to in Jewish tradition. He was in the habit of inviting passers-by to partake of food and drink, and enjoined upon them, while so doing, the duty of thanking God (see *Bereshith Rabbah* to Gen. xiv. 19; xviii. 19, and other references in the Wilna edition, pp. 174, 200). The Talmud relates, *Sotah*, 10 a, that after his guests had partaken of his hospitality, they rose to bless him, upon which he said: "Have ye eaten of that which is mine? Ye have eaten of what belongeth to the God of the World. Give, therefore, praise and acknowledgment to him, who spake and lo! the world was,"—למי שאמר והיה העולם—(vide Wünsche's rendering, *Der babyl. Talmud*, II, Leipzig, 1887, pp. 259-260; Grünbaum, *l. c.*, p. 120). A fuller account of Abraham's hospitality is given by Beer in his *Leben Abrahams*, Leipzig, 1859, p. 56, and S. Baring-Gould, in his *Legends of the Patriarchs and Prophets* (New York, 1872), p. 187

¹ A paper read at the annual meeting of the American Oriental Society, April, 1900.

² See on the whole history of the term "Friend of God," with special reference to Abraham, the exhaustive article of Steinschneider, "Der Freund Gottes," in Jellinek's *Sabbatblatt*, V, 1860, no. 20, pp. 78-79.

(cf. also W. Mayer, "Gastfreundschaft," in Busch's *Kalender und Jahrbuch für Israeliten*, vol. V, Vienna, 1846, pp. 312-314). I remark in passing that Job also was considered by the ancients as a type of a generous Bedouin saint whose nomadic tent was the joy of God and man. In the Greek *Testament of Job* (published by Angelo Mai in his *Scriptorum Veterum Nova Collectio* (Rome, 1833), vol. VII, pp. 180-191, and republished by Kohler in *Semitic Studies in Memory of Rev. Dr. A. Kohut*, Berlin, 1897, pp. 296-338), ch. iii, 8, we read: Καὶ εἴ τις ἤρχετο αἰτῶν ἐλεημοσύνην, εἶχε τρέφεισθαι ἐν τῇ τραπέζῃ μου τοῦ λαβεῖν τὴν χρεῖαν. καὶ οὐδένα ἀπέτρεπον ἐξελθεῖν τὴν θύραν μου κόλπῳ κενῷ, "And if any one came asking for alms, he found food on my table to take all he needed, and I turned nobody away to leave my door with an empty stomach." [κόλπῳ κενῷ=כֶּלֶבֶת שָׁבוּעַ of the Rabbinic story of Akibah; cf. *Aboth de R. Nathan*, ch. VI; Gittin 56a: בֵּל שְׁנֵנִים לְבִיתוֹ רַעֲב כֶּלֶב יֵצֵא שָׁבוּעַ, vide Kohler, *l. c.*, pp. 280, 318, note 2.] In all probability, says Kohler, p. 276, Job became a type of the philanthropic receiver of strangers, the pattern of a Bedouin prince of hospitality in popular tradition, long before Abraham was rendered such. It is evident, therefore, from all this that tradition desired to emphasize his religious fervor as much as his hospitality.

There is a legend concerning Abraham and a heathen, whose origin has not yet been investigated. It is popularly accredited to Benjamin Franklin, whose version we shall give below. Milman, in his *History of the Jews* (Am. ed., New York, 1877), vol. III, p. 459, note, ascribes it to George Gentius (died 1667), who quotes it in the dedication (to the Consuls, Senate, and people of Hamburg) of his Latin version of Solomon Ibn Verga's *Shebet Yehuda* [cf. Fürst, *Bibl. Judaica*, III, 474; Steinschneider, *Catal. Bodl.*, 1009], published in Amsterdam, in 1651, 1654 and 1680 in 4° [not 1690 as Milman, *l. c.*]. I regret that, at present writing, I have no access to the Latin translation¹, so as to verify Milman's reference. The apologue of Abraham and the Fire-worshipper has become so widely known to English readers that it is interesting to note its first mention in the works of Jeremy Taylor, the eminent English divine, who died in the same year as the Latin translator of the Jewish Chronicle (1667). In his *Θεολογία Ἑκλεκτική, or a Discourse of the Liberty of Prophesying*, sect. XXII, ed. Bohn, London, 1867, vol. II, p. 418, he says, in speaking of communication with dissenting churches, that the following story he found "*in the Jews' books.*" It is not at all unlikely that he copied it from the Latin

¹ For a review of the Latin version of *Shebet Yehuda*, see Dr. M. Wiener's German translation, Hannover, 1856, pp. xix-xxvii.

version of Gentius. "When Abraham sat at his tent-door, according to his custom, waiting to entertain strangers, he espied an old man stooping and leaning on his staff, weary with age and travail, coming towards him, who was a hundred years of age: he received him kindly, washed his feet, provided supper, caused him to sit down: but, observing that the old man ate and prayed not, nor begged for a blessing on his meat, he asked him why he did not worship the God of heaven. The old man told him that he worshipped the fire only, and acknowledged no other God. At which answer Abraham grew so zealously angry, that he thrust the old man out of his tent, and exposed him to all the evils of the night and an unguarded condition. When the old man was gone, God called to Abraham, and asked him where the stranger was: he replied, 'I thrust him away because he did not worship thee.' God answered him, 'I have suffered him these hundred years, although he dishonoured me; and couldst thou not endure him one night, when he gave thee no trouble?' Upon this saith the story, 'Abraham fetched him back again, and gave him hospitable entertainment and wise instruction.' Go thou and do likewise, and thy charity will be rewarded by the God of Abraham."

Jeremy Taylor's version of this beautiful legend is no doubt the source of Benjamin Franklin's account which is frequently quoted in his name. A recent contributor to a religious paper claims to have found it in the leaves of an old and forgotten magazine, where the following is related: Franklin's love for his fellow men was coequal with his knowledge, and it is not surprising that he was pronounced in his views upon religious persecution, citing such as inhuman and barbarous in the extreme. On one occasion when in the company of a circle of friends in Paris, the conversation had turned upon the subject of intolerance, and Franklin presented unanswerable arguments against what he asserted to be a practice so obviously repugnant to every dictate of humanity. After refuting opinions advanced by some of the circle and in support of the views he had advanced, he called for a Bible, and turning to the Book of Genesis, he remarked that he would proceed to read the following as authority for his statements:—

CHAPTER LXVII.

1. And it came to pass after these things, that Abraham sat in the door of his tent, about the going down of the sun.
2. And behold, a man bowed with age, coming from the way of the wilderness, leaning on a staff.
3. And Abraham arose and met him, and said unto him, Turn in,

I pray thee, and wash thy feet and tarry all night, and thou shalt arise early in the morning and go thy way.

4. But the man said, Nay, for I will abide under this tree.

5. And Abraham pressed him greatly ; so he turned and they went into the tent ; and Abraham baked unleavened bread, and they did eat.

6. And when Abraham saw that the man blessed not God, he said unto him, Wherefore dost thou not worship the Most High God, Creator of heaven and earth ?

7. And the man answered and said, I do not worship thy God, neither do I call upon his name ; for I have made to myself a God which abideth always in my house, and provideth me with all things.

8. And Abraham's zeal was kindled against the man, and he arose and fell upon him and drove him forth with blows into the wilderness.

9. And at midnight God called unto Abraham, Where is the stranger ?

10. And Abraham answered and said, Lord, he would not worship thee, neither would he call upon thy name ; therefore have I driven him out from before my face into the wilderness.

11. And God said, Have I borne with him these hundred, ninety and eight years, and nourished and clothed him, notwithstanding his rebellion against me ; and couldst not thou, that art thyself a sinner, bear with him one night ?

12. And Abraham said, Let not the anger of my Lord wax hot against his servant ; lo, I have sinned ; forgive me, I pray thee.

13. And he arose and went forth into the wilderness, and sought diligently for the man and found him.

14. And he returned with him to his tent ; and when he had entreated him kindly, he sent him away in the morning with gifts.

15. And God spake again unto Abraham, saying, For this thy sin, shall thy seed be afflicted four hundred years in a strange land.

16. But for thy repentance will I deliver them ; and they shall come forth with power, and with gladness of heart, and with much substance.

The *raconteur* concludes this story of Franklin as follows :—

“I was struck with the aptness of the passage to the subject, and did not fail to express my surprise that in all the discourses I had read against a practice so diametrically opposite to the genuine spirit of our holy religion, I did not remember to have seen this chapter quoted, nor did I recollect my ever having read it, though no stranger to my Bible. Next morning, turning to the Book of Genesis, I found there was no such chapter, and that the whole was a well-meant invention of my friend, whose sallies of humour, in which he is a great master, have always a useful and benevolent tendency.”

The same story is found with some variations in a rare volume of

tracts on religious tolerance, entitled: *Collection of Testimonies in favour of Religious Liberty, in the case of the Dissenters, Catholics, and Jews. By a Christian Politician.* London, 1790, pp. 88-89, Article XVIII, superscribed with the words: "A parable against persecution by Dr. Franklin, in imitation of Scripture Language; founded upon a Jewish tradition." To this the editor of the volume adds a note: "The following parable against persecution was communicated to me," says Lord Cairns, "by Doctor Franklin, of Philadelphia, a man who makes a great figure in the learned world; and who would still make a greater figure for benevolence and candour, were virtue as much regarded in this declining age as knowledge. The historical style of the Old Testament is here finely imitated; and the moral must strike every one who is not sunk in stupidity and superstition. Were it really a chapter of Genesis, one is apt to think that persecution could never have shown a bare face among the Jews and Christians. But alas! that is a vain thought. Such a passage in the O. T. would avail as little against the rancorous passions of men, as the following passages in the New Testament, though persecution cannot be condemned in terms more explicit," . . . &c. (On pp. 66-68 is printed another letter by Dr. Franklin on the subject of religious liberty, written in 1772.)

What is the origin of this parable? Both Jeremy Taylor and Benjamin Franklin claim to have seen it referred to as a Jewish tradition, and L. Weiss quotes it in an abbreviated form in his *Talmudic and other Legends* (New York, 1889²), pp. 66-67¹. There is not the slightest trace of the story in Rabbinic sources. Neither Beer, nor Gould, nor even the painstaking Grünbaum, refer to it anywhere. To my astonishment I find the same story beautifully rendered into Hebrew by *Nachman Krochmal* (1785-1840), in a rare periodical published in 1844: *ירושלים הבנויה* (Jerusalem, 1844; printed at Zolkiew, *imprimatur* given in Lemberg, Nov. 29, 1844!). This contribution of Krochmal's is not mentioned either by Zunz or Fürst or Steinschneider (*Catal. Bodl.*, s. v., p. 1589-90), and deserves to be reproduced in full, if only for its classical diction:—

משל מוסרי

- (א) ויהי אחרי הדברים האלה ואברהם יושב פתח האהל כבא השמש:
(ב) וירא והנה איש זקן ושבע ימים בא מבא דרך המדברה נשען על מטו:

¹ A brief version of the parable is given in Horace E. Scudder's *Book of Legends* (1900), under the title, "Abraham and his Visitor."

(ג) ויקם אברהם וירץ לקראתו ויאמר בי אדוני אל נא תעבור מעל עבדך סורה אלי רחץ רגליך ולינה פה הלילה והשכמת בבוקר והלכת לדרכך: (ד) וימאן האיש ויאמר לא כי פה אלץ תחת האלה ויפצר בו מאד ויסר אליו האהלה: (ה) ויקח אברהם חמאה וחלב וישם לפניו ומצות אפה ויאכלו: (ו) ויהי אחרי אכלו ואחרי שתו ויאמר אליו אברהם עתה נברך ליי עליך קונה שמים וארץ כי השביענו מטובו: (ז) ויען האיש ויאמר לא ידעתי את אלהיך ואת שמו לא אברך כי אם אלהי אשר עשו אצבעותי השוכן עמי בבית ונותן לי כל מחסורי: (ח) ויחר אף אברהם באיש ויקם בחמתו ויגרשהו המדברה: (ט) ויבא אלהים אל אברהם ויאמר אברהם איה האיש אשר בא אליך הלילה: (י) ויען אברהם ויאמר הן גרשתי מעל פני כי לא אבה להורות לשמך: (יא) ויאמר יי ראה הנה אנכי נשאתי את פשעו זה מאה ותשעים ותשע שנה הלבשתי כלכלתי אף כי חמרה את רוחי ואתה בן אדם אשר בעון חוללת נלאית כלכל אותו לילה אחד?: (יב) ויאמר אברהם אל נא יחר אף אדוני בעבדך חטאתי הפעם בי אדוני סלח נא: (יג) וימהר אברהם וירץ המדברה ויבקש את האיש וימצאהו וישיבהו האהלה וידבר אתו טובות: (יד) ויהי בבקר וישלחהו לדרכו וגם צדה נתן לו וילך: (טו) ויהי דבר יי אל אברהם שנית לאמר יען כי נכנעת לפני ותעש הישר בעיני גם אנכי אזכור את בריתי לזרעך אחריו אשר בהעוותם והוכחתים בשבט אנשים: (יו) אך את בריתי לא אפיר אתם והשיבותים לארמתם המה יהיו לי לעם ואני אהיה להם לאלהים עד עולם:

Krochmal divides the parable into sixteen verses, as Franklin did, and must, therefore, have had before him either a German translation, or possibly a copy of the English version, since the above is almost a verbal translation of Franklin's narrative. Similar legends and apologues are quoted by Russian and Galician *Maggidim* in illustration of Scriptural texts in discourse. In the collection of homilies and anecdotes ascribed to Jacob Dubno, popularly known as the *Dubno Gaon*, entitled אהל יעקב (5 parts, Warsaw, 1874), there is no reference made to this apologue, though it is strange that it has escaped the attention of the "father of storytellers" (אבי המושלים), as he was deferentially called. I am glad to be able to point out the probable source of the parable, so widely circulated through the genial Franklin, and it is remarkable that its *Persian origin* had not long since been suggested by the mention of a FIRE-WORSHIPPER in the version of Jeremy Taylor quoted above.

It is to be found in the *Būstān* (بوستان) of SA'DĪ (1184-1291 ?), where it is imbedded among other choice moral tales written by this "Nightingale of a Thousand Songs." The *Gulistān*, or *Rose-Garden*, was known to Occidental scholars in a Latin version as early as the second half of the seventeenth century. Of the *Būstān* or *Garden of Perfume* there are no translations earlier than this century. GEORGE GENTIUS, as we have seen above, was the Latin translator of Ibn Verga's Hebrew chronicle, *שנהב יהודה*, the first edition of which appeared at Amsterdam, anno 1651, in the very same year when he published his Latin version of Sa'dī, entitled *Rosarium politicum*. It is easy now to explain how the story of Abraham's lesson in tolerance crept into the Preface of his translation of *Shebet Yehudah*, when the parable was fresh in his mind during the perusal of Sa'dī's works.

I have no complete edition of the *Būstān* in English [cf. for a brief bibliography and interesting selections the article *Sa'dī* in Charles Dudley Warner's *Library of the World's Best Literature*, vol. XXII (1897), pp. 12634-58, written by A. V. Williams Jackson] and I quote from the "compiled" version of Moncure Daniel Conway, in his *Sacred Anthology*, 1st ed., New York, 1874, pp. 61-62, no. XCVII, s. v. "Toleration" :—

"For a week Abraham would scarce break his fast for fear some hungry traveller might pass needing his store. Daily he looked out upon the desert, and on a day he beheld the bent form of an aged man, his hair white as snow, tottering towards his door. 'Guest of mine eyes,' said Abraham, 'enter thou with welcome, and be pleased to share my bread and salt.' The stranger entered, and to him was given the place of honour. When the cloth was spread, and the family had gathered round the board, each uttered *Bismillah* ('In the name of God') save one: the aged guest uttered no word. Abraham said, 'Old man, is it not right when thou dost eat thy food to repeat the name of God?' The stranger said, 'My custom is that of the fire-worshipper.' Then Abraham arose in wrath, and drove the aged Geber from his house. Even as he did so, a swift-winged spirit stood before the patriarch and said—'Abraham! for a hundred years the divine bounty has flowed out in sunshine and rain, in bread and life, to this man: is it for thee to withhold thy hand from him because his worship is not thine?'"

Leigh Hunt, whose admirable adaptations from Oriental authors are as felicitous as any by Rückert or Bodenstedt, has written a charming paraphrase of this apologue in the form of a "dramatic parable," entitled: *Abraham and the Fire-Worshipper*. His source is undoubtedly Sa'dī's *Būstān*, as he was familiar with all the fanciful creations of the East. He skilfully interweaves with his narrative

"Elijah's interview" with God, about which Campbell has written an exquisite poem, using "the still small voice" in the sense of a heavenly echo—a favourite figure of the Rabbis quoted by Wordsworth and Whittier (cf. a poem by the present writer on Elijah [I Kings xix. 11-13] in the *American Hebrew*, Feb. 9, 1900). Leigh Hunt's poem is included in Isabel E. Cohen's *Readings and Recitations for Jewish Homes and Schools* (Philadelphia, 1895), pp. 44-48, no. 18.

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